



Take 5

For Safety



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Deep-fried, safety style

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For Will Eggleston, a safety professional with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Huntsville, Ala., frying a turkey for the holidays wasn't as simple as it seemed.

"I thought frying the turkey would be a great way to speed up the cooking process," Eggleston said. "Depending on the size, you can fry a whole turkey in about 30 minutes versus slow roasting one for four or five hours."

Eggleston thought he'd done everything right that Thanksgiving morning. He'd started defrosting his 20-pound turkey in the refrigerator three days before and meticulously scoured his new turkey fryer's instruction booklet. In accordance with the manufacturer's directions, he placed the fryer 20 feet from his house, almost at the end of his driveway, and closely watched the oil thermometer inch its way to the recommended temperature. He wasn't prepared, however, for the "fireworks" that would erupt soon after he dropped the turkey and frying basket into the white-hot oil.

Eggleston could only watch in horror as the cooking oil quickly rose and spilled onto the propane flames below. His turkey — lovingly seasoned and basted — flew 40 to 50 feet into the air before smashing into the hood of his next-door neighbor's pickup. Hot oil splashed 15 feet in all directions, and it wasn't long before the entire front yard was aflame. It took a visit from the fire department to douse the fire and turn off Eggleston's propane burner.

Despite all his attention to detail and preparation for the task, how did Eggleston's first attempt at turkey frying turn into such a disaster?

"The turkey wasn't fully defrosted," Eggleston explained. "I thought it was. It had been in the refrigerator three days and I even checked it when I was cleaning and seasoning it. I learned a very important lesson that day: Gallons of hot oil and a frosty bird don't mix!"

Eggleston certainly isn't alone in his near-catastrophic experience. In fact, safety experts with Underwriters Laboratories have refused to certify any turkey frying devices with its trusted "UL" symbol due to increasing reports of fryer accidents. According to UL, potential hazards include:

- **Tipping.** The gallons of hot oil used in turkey fryers can cause devastating burns and property damage.
- **Overfilling.** Using too much oil is easy to do, and hot oil may spill out of the unit when the turkey is placed in the pot. If oil hits the burner, fire is a real possibility.
- **Spillover.** Partially frozen turkeys placed in the fryer pot can cause a spillover effect. This, too, may result in fire.
- **Overheating.** Without thermostat controls, turkey fryers have the potential to overheat oil to the point of combustion.
- **Burns.** The sides of the cooking pot, lid and handles get dangerously hot, posing severe burn hazards.

There are currently several electric turkey fryers on the market that provide the same deep-fried deliciousness without the propane and flames. Some of these products can even be used indoors, which is a major no-no for conventional turkey fryers.

For those who still plan to fry their holiday bird on an outdoor gas cooker, the Consumer Product Safety Commission offers the following guidelines:

- Keep the fryer in full view while the burner is on.
- Place the fryer in an open area away from all walls, fences or other structures.
- Never use the fryer in, on or under a garage, breezeway, carport, porch or other structure that can catch fire.
- Raise and lower food slowly to reduce splatter and avoid burns.
- Cover bare skin when adding or removing food.

For more information, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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